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ABSTRACT

This research project represents the results of 264 questionnaires received from United States college and university libraries with a student enrollment of 3,000 or more. The results show that while there is widespread use of students in a variety of positions with varying degrees of responsibility, there is little effort made to organize any form of training program; set standards for employment; or pay a standardized wage. In addition, few records are kept as to the length of service or their work performance. The author hopes that this report of the survey results will stimulate action toward the standardization of accepted selection and training procedures for student library assistants. The questionnaire and sample cover letter are appended. (Author/SJ)

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FACTORS RELATING TO THE EMPLOYMENT OF STUDENT ASSISTANTS IN MAJOR AMERICAN COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

A Research Project

Submitted to the

Graduate Department of Library and Information Sciences

Brigham Young University

Provo, Utah

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements of the

Master of Library Science Degree

By

William H. Williams

Spring Semester 1969

LI 003 762

Approved:

Instructor, L.S. 697 H. Thayne Johnson Date 4/15/69

PREFACE

This paper is an attempt to discover and explore the advantages and disadvantages of the employment of students in the university and college Libraries of the United States. From this study it is hoped that recommendations may be developed to aid librarians in the selection and evaluation of student employees.

In addition, the results of this project may well furnish the impetus necessary for the establishment of a standard of competence.

The reader may be startled by some aspects of this study. For example, apparently there are no records kept by the universities or colleges questioned on how long a student employee may be expected to remain employed in the library although all admit that the turnover rate is high.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to express his appreciation to the following people for their advice, counsel, and labor in connection with the planning, organization, and production of this work; Mr. H. Thayne Johnson for his encouragement and aid in project selection and questionnaire design; Mrs. Vivian VanAusdale for many hours spent in the preparation of correspondence; and finally, to my wife Helen for her help in key punching the results of the questionnaires and in typing this paper.

ABSTRACT

This project represents the results of 264 questionnaires received from United States colleges and universities with a student enrollment of 3000 or more. The results show that while there is widespread use of students in a variety of positions with varying degrees of responsibility, there is little effort made to organize any form of training program; set standards for employment; or pay a standardized wage. In addition, few records are kept as to the length of service or their work performance.

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CHAPTER I

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

This study is based on the hypothesis that standard criteria of employment and training of library student assistants is both feasible and essential to the proper operation of the college and university library.

It has long been recognized that there exists a great diversity of employment training standards and qualifications in the hiring of student assistants in American college and university libraries. While some colleges and universities make a sincere effort to employ those who are best qualified by virtue of training and interest in library positions, others use library employment as a prime source for placement of students who need work in order to remain in school.

It is the author's belief that while there are many positions in the library which may be staffed adequately through the use of relatively untrained student assistants, many libraries do themselves and their public a disservice by not insisting on proper standards for employment. While is it apparent that each library situation is unique and that variations will occur, yet the acceptance of minimum standards for employment in those positions which by their very nature exert an influence on the patrons would benefit

both the library and its public.

This survey was limited to colleges and universities of the United States and Puerto Rico with a student enrollment of 3000 or more, offering an accredited four year course of instruction, and having a graduate school.

In establishing what research has been done in this area, the following sources were searched for the period 1955 to date:

Bibliographic Index

Business Periodicals Index

Cumulative Book Index

Education Index

Library Literature

International Index

Public Affairs Information Service

New York Times Index

Vertical File Index

It was felt that any studies made earlier than 1955 would no longer have any validity. The results of the search were generally disappointing; however, those sources which provided any background for this study are listed in the bibliography.

The literature search indicated little recent work in the area of employment and training of student assistants except in isolated cases relating to an individual college or university. It was therefore determined to design a questionnaire [see appendix page 21] which would provide a broad sampling of the employment and utilization of student

assistants in the libraries.

Unfortunately, while the questionnaire seemed generally well designed, a shortage of time did not allow for extensive pretesting with the result that some confusion was generated on at least two questions. These will be explained in detail in the chapter on data analysis.

Through the period 5-10 December 1968, three hundred fifty-six questionnaires, along with a cover letter and a stamped, self-addressed envelope [see appendix p. 257] were mailed to various colleges and universities of the United States. Of this group it appears that four or five did not reach their destinations; at least one was destroyed in the Christmas mail rush as a self-addressed envelope was returned after being found on the floor of the Chicago post office. By January 6, 1969 two hundred sixty-four questionnaires, or 75.4%, had been received and tabulated. *Indications are that* the bulk of replies have now been received as only one or two have been coming in each day.

It is interesting to note that those who responded did so enthusiastically with over 90% desiring to receive copies of the results. An analysis of the returns indicate the best response to be from the larger universities and smaller colleges The smaller colleges and universities were almost universal in asking that the results be sent to them. This, perhaps, indicates an interest in utilizing a limited budget to its fullest through use of any significant recommendations produced as a result of this survey.

CHAPTER II

ANALYSIS OF DATA

A statistical analysis was run using the IBM 360 Computer and the Stat. 08 program. This allows a comparison of one question [with all its answers] with all other questions and their answers giving the numeric total, the percentages, the mean, and the sigma. The comparisons were limited to those questions which were related to one another, such as size of the library to the number of students employed.

The following is a question by question breakdown along with comments and observations made as a result of the survey.

Question 1 Do you hire student assistants?

Answer 264 Yes 0 No

All questionnaires returned were from colleges or universities hiring student assistants. This would lead one to believe that many who did not respond do not hire student assistants.

Question 2 What is the size of your collection?

Answer

14...50,000 or less

19...50,000 to 100,000

73...100,000 to 200,000

44...200,000 to 300,000

34...300.000 to 500,000

19...500,000 to 750,000

17...750,000 to 1,000,000

22...1,000,000 to 2,000,000

8...2,000,000 to 3,000,000

6...3,000,000 or more

This distribution is graphically portrayed in chart 1 as a function of number of students employed. As the size of the library is a determining factor in the answers to the majority of the questions on the survey, this question was compared with all other questions.

Question 3 Number of full time professional staff?

Answer

32...5 or less

40...5 to 10

52...10 to 15

38...15 to 20

33...20 to 30

18...30 to 40

3...40 to 50

0...50 or more

The ratio of full time staff as a function of size is borne out statistically by this survey. The greatest variations occured with one library with a collection of 50,000 or less who had 15 to 20 full time professionals and one library with a collection of 200,000 to 300,000 with a professional staff of 5 or less, but in general, the staff rises with the collection.

Question 4 Non-professional full time staff (including custodial)

Answer

50...5 to 10

64...10 to 20

16...20 to 25

28...25 to 30

21...35 to 40

11...45 to 50

13...55 to 60

11...60 to 70

42...80 plus

This question caused some comment as many of the larger libraries do not hire their custodial staff; therefore, did not know the total hired. Many gave the figures less the custodial staff.

Question 5 How many students do you employ during the regular semester/quarter?

Answer

2...5 or less

2...5 to 10

5...10 to 15

13..15 to 20

15..20 to 25

19..25 to 30

22..30 to 40

15..40 to 50

27..50 to 60

135..60 or more

It is unfortunate that this question was not expanded at the upper rather than at the lower end as several libraries indicated that they employed in excess of 150 students. Although one might expect collection size to be the determining factor in the number of students employed, there were some notable exceptions. For example, a large eastern university with a library collection in excess of 300,000 volumes hired less than five students because they felt that when they were needed (at the end of the semester to reshelve books) they were least likely to be available.

Question 6 Do you hire on the need of the student?

Answer

113 Yes 142 No

This question was often qualified by such statements as "We hire only work-study program students whose needs are determined by the university," or "We have to hire who we can get regardless of need." Many resented the implication that they might be forced to employ students solely on the basis of need; therefore, there was considerable explanation on this question.

Question 7 Do you hire only those with library science background?

Answer

2 Yes 253 No

Comments made in connection with this question were generally of the "We would hire them if we could get them" type.

Question 8 Do you give any pre-employment tests?

Answer

19 Yes 236 No

This answer was surprising to the author as he had assumed that more was required for employment in a library than mere application. Even those who said that pre-employment tests were given pointed out that they were of a general nature and not oriented to any particular position.

Question 9 Do you give any pre-employment training?

Answer

35 Yes 220 No

Those who answered yes said that it was merely a short orientation of the library.

Question 10 Do you have a training guide?

Answer

114 Yes 141 No

Of those who said yes, most indicated that it was limited to one or two departments in the library. Several who said no thought that they should have one.

Question 11 Do you require any preparatory courses in library science before application?

Answer

3 Yes 252 No

The vast majority felt that this would be desireable but not practical in light of the need for student help and the high turnover rate.

Question 12 What is the maximum student weekly work load in hours?

Answer

9...5 to 10

186...10 to 20

31...20 to 25

15...25 to 30

14...35 to 40

Question 13 What is the minimum work load hours/week?

Answer

52...5 or less

134...5 to 10

65...10 to 15

4...15 to 20

0...20 to 25

Questions 12 and 13 help to establish the general pattern of the normal student work load of 20 hours maximum and 10 hours minimum. The difficulty presented here is that if you hire someone to work only 10 hours a week you have to hire someone else to work the other 10 hours, so you double your work force which increases the administrative load.

Question 14 What is the beginning wage?

Answer

1...$1.00/hr or less

82...$1.00 to $1.25

113...$1.25 to $1.50

46...$1.50 to $1.75

10...$1.75 to $2.00

3...$2.00 or more

This question brought several comments regarding the fact that they were under the Federal Fair Wage Act and were forced to pay $1.30/hr beginning in February 1969. Supposedly those paying less are private colleges or universities who do not have to conform to this standard. One or two people felt that this denied them the opportunity to give merit wage increases.

Question 15 Do you offer yearly increases?

Answer

157. Yes 97 No

Question 16 If so, how much?

Answer

62...$.05-$.10/hr

74...$.10-$.15/hr

19...$.20-$.25/hr

2...$.30-$.35/hr

1...$.40-$.45/hr

1...$.50 plus

As indicated above these figures may change drastically as a result of the Federal Fair Wage Act. This may mean the discontinuance of yearly increases by some libraries as the increased minimum wage will use up the budget. Many indicated various methods of giving periodic increases, some were very imaginative. The more interesting methods will be discussed in detail in chapter 3.

Question 17 What duties do you assign to student employees?

Answer

255...Circulation

169...Exit Control

249...Pages
125...Reference
181...Cataloging
183...Serials
210...Order Department
21...Assistant Floor or Subject Librarian
32...Custodial
153...Bindery
157...Inter-library Loan
96...Special Collections
56...Bibliographics
87...Other

This question was answered by a total of 256 colleges and universities indicating that only one did not assign students to circulation, whereas 87 did not assign students to exit control. This question created some ambiguity in the minds of the respondents as to the level of responsibility being assumed in these various departments. All indicated that the student's role was definitely a subordinate one in all departments of the library. Also, many receive their custodial help from the physical plant and have no control over these students. This confusion may account for the 21 answering yes to assigning students as assistant floor or subject librarians. Most meant that the students assisted the floor librarians, though a few indicated that graduate assistants were assigned these duties at night.

Question 31 How would you rate their general performance?

Answer

32...Excellent

187...Good

34...Fair

1...Poor

This question presupposed a wide range of performance within any library and asked only for the general or average performance. Many wanted a sliding scale, i.e., Fair to Good, Good to Excellent, etc. One or two took this opportunity to discuss the problems involved in ratings as no standards or job descriptions exist. Others mentioned the fact that work-study employees were kept on even if their work was marginal whereas a regular student employee would be discharged for the same level of performance.

Question 32 What is the average length of time a student remains employed in the library?

Answer

8...less than 6 months

95...6 to 12 months

95...12 to 18 months

60...2 years or longer

Without exception this was perhaps the most thought provoking question in the survey and the one which evoked the most comments. Many who answered said that they had no idea because they had not kept statistics on the question. Most admitted that this was the greatest problem facing their library in regard to student assistants.

Question 33 Do you have a graduate library school? If no, disregard questions 34 and 35.

Answer

50 Yes 208 No

Question 34 Do you offer graduate assistantships?

Answer

29 Yes

Question 35 If you have a graduate library school, do you employ your own graduates after graduation?

Answer

43 Yes

It is interesting to note that while 50 schools had graduate library schools only 29 offered graduate assistantships. Many others indicated that student assistantships were available in their library to students of other departments on campus. Of the schools employing their own graduates, most said only on a limited basis.

Question 36 Geographical location of the college or university.

While this was not on the questionnaire, the geographical location was punched on the cards with the following results:

90 Northeast	Me., Vt., N.H., Mass., N.Y., N.J., Ohio, R.I., Conn., Del., Pa., Md., Ind., Mich., Va., W. Va., Ky., D.C.
40 Southeast	Tenn., Miss., N.C., S.C., Ga., Fla., Ala., Puerto Rico
75 Central	Wis., Ill., Mo., Ark., La., Tex., Okla., Kan., Neb., Minn.,

	Iowa, N. Dak., S. Dak.
45 West	Wyo., Ut., Mont., Colo., Ida., Wash., Ore., Nev., Ariz., Calif., N.M., Alaska, Hawaii

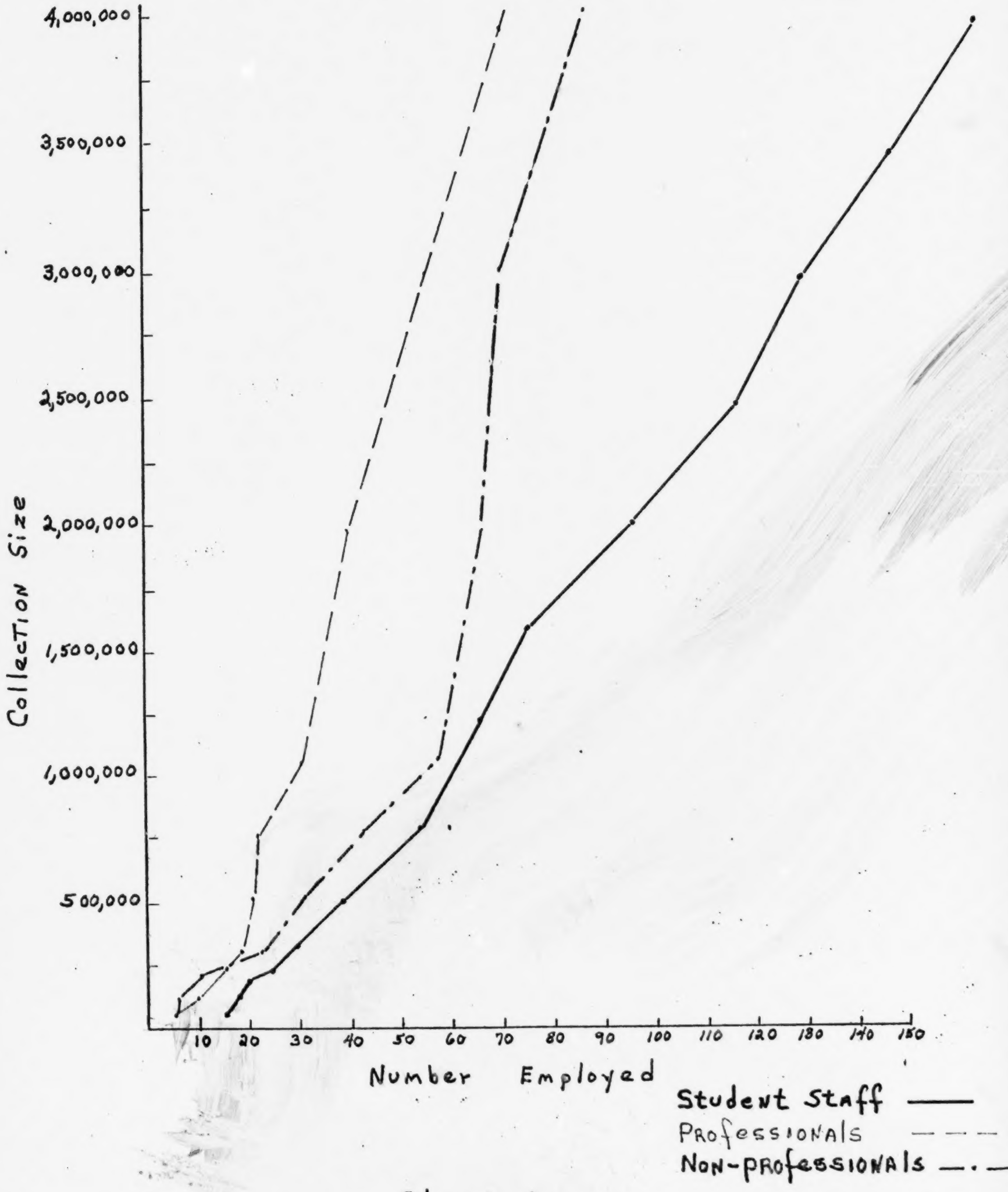
4,000,000
3,500,000
3,000,000
2,500,000
2,000,000
1,500,000
1,000,000
500,000
Collection Size
10
20
30
40
50
60
70
80
90
100
110
120
130
140
150
Number Employed
Student Staff
Professionals
Non-professionals

Chart 1

CHAPTER III

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The desired purpose of this study was to determine if employment standards were being used in the hiring of student employees. If not, to make some recommendations to all interested colleges and universities along with a recommendation to the appropriate committee of ALA.

An analysis of the results reveal that employment standards exist only locally, if at all, and vary among the so called multi-university structure where one would expect standardization. There appears to be no policy at any regional level and certainly not one of national origin except the minimum wage standard imposed by the government on all public colleges and universities.

This author does not intend to go further than providing a clearing house for ideas and policies used by the various colleges and universities with the hope that interest may be stimulated in the organized development of recommended procedures by some agencies such as the American Library Association.

The picture that emerges from the comments and analysis of the questionnaires is one in which a student is employed with little more screening than that he either needs the job

in order to remain in school; is on a work-study program; or it appears from his grade point average that he will not fail if he works 20 hours a week. He does not need to have any understanding of the workings of the library other than what he is shown in a walk through lasting about one half hour. He has less than 50% chance that there is a training manual for his use or that his supervisor has any organized plan of instruction for him. Yet, within a day or so he is representing the library's image at the circulation desk, the exit control, or on the floor as a book page. Incidently, don't let anyone ever tell you that the pages do not influence the image of your library because they are asked more directions and questions than all reference and floor librarians combined. This one reason alone warrants the need for some organized instruction on such things as: what circulates, for how long, where is the periodical index, and a myriad of other questions.

One of the most annoying and perplexing problems of hiring student help is that of longivity. The turnover rate at best is about 12 months. Many commented that while they had not kept records, the turnover rate was their number one problem. Economics alone would be enough to justify a college or university endeavoring to screen its applicants for suitability and providing a good orientation and training program to make the student feel that he is contributing something worthwhile.

A cost study would probably show that the money spent on properly training one student assistant who remains employed in the library during his entire school career would be less

than the loss of production occasioned by hiring five relatively untrained, unmotivated six month students. Most librarians seem to feel that the only way to find students who will stay is to hire one hundred hoping that twenty will remain.

I would suggest that the librarians make a study of how long students are employed, how many man hours of professionsl time it takes to train them to the point where they need little or no supervision, and the overall loss of production from the time the trained student leaves until the replacement is doing equally as well. The author's experience in training pages suggests that it takes about 12 to 15 hours of professional instruction and supervision plus approximately 60 hours during which the page shelves at less than half the speed of the experienced page. This represents a combined expenditure of something like 45 hours in lost production or about $67.00. When you multiply this by ten or twenty replacements a year in each major department you could easily afford a ten hour course of instruction in order to both train and motivate the student.

There is much more to this than just training. A new employee should start out as a page, unless he is exceptionally well qualified for another position. There should be a definite career field so that he knows that perhaps in six months he will be able to move to circulation, exit control, or elsewhere with an appropriate increase in both pay and responsibility. The practice of replacing students who resign from the circulation department with new hires should be avoided and senior pages given the opportunity for advancement.

In the matter of pay increases, the system which seems to hold the most promise and equity is that of automatic pay raises after working a set number of hours. For example, a five cent increase every four hundred hours to a maximum of $2.25 per hour. This does not penalize the student who works during the summer or semester breaks. There still should be incentive or merit pay increases available for the outstanding workers and this should be determined on the basis of a written rating against a set stantard of expected performance for the position.

In conclusion, the survey points out anew the divergence of opinions on the training and utilization of student assistants running from those who discourage their use to those who could not get by without them. On the assumption that it is of mutual benefit to both the student and the library to employ students, why not set out today to make a study to improve their training, careers, and retention?

APPENDIX

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Please disregard the numbering system used in this questionnaire as it is designed for computer tabulation in order to provide complete anonymity. Please indicate your response with a check mark in the appropriate space.

1. Do you hire student assistants?

___(1) Yes ___(0) No

[If the above is answered "No" then please fill out questions 1-4 and return.]

2. What is the size of your collection?

___(0) 50,000 or less
___(1) 50,000 to 100,000
___(2) 100,000 to 200,000
___(3) 200,000 to 300,000
___(4) 300,000 to 500,000
___(5) 500,000 to 750,000
___(6) 750,000 to 1,000,000
___(7) 1,000,000 to 2,000,000
___(8) 2,000,000 to 3,000,000
___(9) 3,000,000 or more

3. Number of full time staff

Professional full time

___(0) 5 or less
___(1) 5 to 10
___(2) 10 to 15
___(3) 15 to 20
___(4) 20 to 30
___(5) 30 to 40
___(6) 40 to 50
___(7) 50 plus

4. Non-professional full time (including custodial)

___(0) 5 to 10
___(1) 10 to 20
___(2) 20 to 25
___(3) 25 to 30
___(4) 35 to 40
___(5) 45 to 50
___(6) 55 to 60
___(7) 60 to 70
___(8) 80 plus

5. How many students do you employ during the regular semester/quarter?

___(0) 5 or less
___(1) 5 to 10
___(2) 10 to 15
___(3) 15 to 20
___(4) 20 to 25
___(5) 25 to 30
___(6) 30 to 40
___(7) 40 to 50
___(8) 50 to 60
___(9) 60 or more

6. Do you hire on the financial need of the student?

___(1) Yes ___(0) No

7. Do you hire only those with Library Science background?

___(1) Yes ___(0) No

8. Do you give any pre-employment tests?

___(1) Yes ___(0) No

9. Do you give any pre-employment training?

___(1) Yes ___(0) No

10. Do you have a training guide?

___(1) Yes ___(0) No

11. Do you require any preparatory courses in Library Science before application for employment?

___(1) Yes ___(0) No

12. What is the maximum student weekly work load in hours?

___(0) 5 to 10
___(1) 10 to 20
___(2) 20 to 25
___(3) 25 to 30
___(4) 35 to 40

13. What is the minimum work load hours/week?

___(0) 5 or less
___(1) 5 to 10
___(2) 10 to 15
___(3) 15 to 20
___(4) 20 to 25

14. What is the beginning wage?

___(0) $1.00 or less
___(1) $1.00 - $1.25/hr.
___(2) $1.25 - $1.50/hr.
___(3) $1.50 - $1.75/hr.
___(4) $1.75 - $2.00/hr.
___(5) $2.00 or more

15. Do you offer yearly increases?

___(1) Yes ___(0) No

16. If so, how much?

___(0) $.05 - $.10/hr.
___(1) $.10 - $.15/hr.
___(2) $.20 - $.25/hr.
___(3) $.30 - $.35/hr.
___(4) $.40 - $.45/hr.
___(5) $.50 plus

17. What duties do you assign student employees?

___(17) Circulation
___(18) Exit control
___(19) Pages (shelvers)
___(20) Reference
___(21) Cataloging
___(22) Serials
___(23) Order department
___(24) Assistant Floor or Subject Librarian
___(25) Custodial
___(26) Bindry
___(27) Inter-library loan
___(28) Special Collections
___(29) Bibliographies
___(30) Other. Please specify_____ _____
_____

31. How would you rate their general performance?

___(0) Excellent
___(1) Good
___(2) Fair
___(3) Poor

32. What is the average length of time a student remains employed in the library?

___(0) Less than six months
___(1) Six to twelve months
___(2) 12 to 18 months
___(3) 2 years or longer

33. Do you have a graduate library school?

___(1) Yes ___(0) No

[If no, disregard questions 34 and 35]

34. Do you offer graduate assistantships?

___(1) Yes ___(0) No

35. If you have a graduate library school, do you employ your own graduates after graduation?

___(1) Yes ___(0) No

Should you wish a copy of the results of this study, please indicate where you wish it sent.

_____

_____

_____

November 29, 1968

Elliott Hardaway, Librarian
University of South Florida
4202 Fowler Avenue
Tampa, Florida 33620

Dear Librarian:

The enclosed questionnaire represents the basis of a graduate study being conducted at Brigham Young University on the employment, training, and utilization of student library assistants.

I believe that the findings of this study may be of interest to you. If you should desire to obtain a copy of the results, will you so indicate at the bottom of the questionnaire enclosed. All information will be strictly confidential and any analysis which would appear in print will be purely statistical.

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Very truly yours,

William H. Williams

William H. Williams

WHW:vdv
Enclosure